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An unsung Indian scout on white horse

Amos Chapman, Son of Western Oklahoma

By Tena Bailey



Amos Chapman, Indian Scout

"Stand Silent. Heroes Here Have Been Who Cleared The Way For Lesser Men. Here on September 12, 1874, two scouts and four soldiers defeated 125 Kiowa and Comanche Indians."

These immortal words, carved on a monument at Allison, Texas, preserve

for our posterity the heroic deeds of the frontiersmen at the Battle of Buffalo Wallow. Amos Chapman, Indian Scout, who was serving under the command of General Nelson A. Miles at that time, was Chief of Scouts at Camp Supply in Indian Territory.

Chapman has been cited as one of Western Oklahoma's unsung heroes. His years of service to his country, his quiet, unpretentious bravery throughout his years on the prairie, and his conduct at Buffalo Wallow made him a son that the State of Oklahoma can proudly

boast. He represented a breed of men that were not so common in the West.

Born in Missouri in 1839, Chapman came to Oklahoma as a lad and grew up in the country as it was at that time. Leaving family and close ties behind, he had only his conscience as his guide and only what protection a boy in knee pants could provide for himself. He wandered onto the Cheyenne Reservation trading calico, beads, and other items for buffalo skins. As a buffalo hunter and Indian trader, he became

issue, ran an account of the Bigger's Wagon Train as it was led to Topeka by Scout Amos Chapman. Mrs. Edna Thomas' diary reads, "Amos Chapman is a quiet man and fortunately for us not a drunkard. Mr. Biggers says he is one of the most efficient on the frontier, but we would like to have an older man as a scout. He is rawboned and of dark complexion, slightly resembles an Indian."

Later in the account, the writer lists many of the heroic deeds of Chapman

families became lost. They were captured by four Indians, who took their rifles and headed their teams away from Bigger's Train. When Chapman became aware that the families of Lunsford and Martin were missing, he started out to find them. When he caught up to them, the Indians had become drunk on whisky found in the wagons, and they were attempting to molest the women. One was dragging Mrs. Lunsford away by her hair when Chapman rode up and shot him. The



An artist's version of the 1874 Buffalo Wallow Fight

familiar with Indian Territory and the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, allowing him to qualify as an Indian scout. He led many wagon trains to safety across the wilderness before being employed by the army at Camp Supply.

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as he directs the people on the train during Indian attacks, handles medical problems, such as rattlesnake bites, and gives some calm remedies to a group who often panics in a strange, foreboding land.

At one point the train was encompassed by a dark dust storm, and two

remaining renegades ran for the horses, which had been released by the dark scout. Though Chapman was injured in the encounter, he led the families back safely to the train.

Chapman wore a wide-brimmed hat, and his vest was made of buckskin decorated with a fine beaded, Indian

design. His hair was black, and he had dark piercing eyes, displaying alertness and shrewdness. While leading wagon trains, he often rode a white horse.

The late Buck Chapman of Darrouzett, Texas, oldest grandson of Amos Chapman, said, "Grandfather was a good-hearted man who always said he had no enemies. But he was tough in a lot of ways."

That toughness was especially evident in the battle of Buffalo Wallow. Chapman and the other surviving white men received the Congressional Medal of Honor for their deeds. Mrs. Ida Tollar, Chapman's granddaughter, described this horrendous encounter in the Dewey County historical book. Enchanted by the traditions of her Cheyenne forefathers, Mrs. Tollar explained the incidents which angered and frustrated the Indians:

"The Indians were disgusted with the white people for what they considered violations of the Treaty of Medicine Lodge. Lone Wolf of the Kiowas, Quannah Parker of the Comanches, and Little Raven of the Arapahoes spoke long and earnestly of war. Chief Lone Wolf was angry because the whites were crossing the Arkansas River and killing buffalo; and Stone Calf of the Cheyenne hadn't forgotten the Black Kettle massacre by Custer."

The Indians killed Pat Hennessey, a freighter, and in one week's time they had killed 175 white men and women and captured their children. At that time, Chapman was based at Camp Supply with General Miles as his commanding officer. Miles was sent out to quell the uprisings and to force the hostiles to surrender or participate in a decisive battle. Indian scouts Chapman and Billy Dixon were part of his troop.

Their efforts to rendezvous with the Red Man proved fruitless because the renegades had retreated toward the vast expanse of canyon country in the Texas panhandle. Ironically, in their flight they split forces, maneuvering to the rear of the Miles expedition where they positioned themselves between him and his supply wagons. Low on ammunition and without ample provisions, the general realized he would have to relay a message to Camp Supply for help.

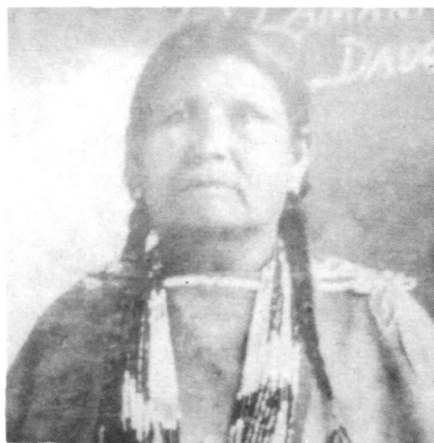
Chapman and Dixon, accompanied by four soldiers, decided to deliver that message. Recognizing secrecy as their prized protector, they traveled at night with daylight finding them bedded down safely, where no eye sweeping

the prairie could observe.

On the morning of September 13, 1874, as the men topped a rise near the Washita River near the Texas panhandle, they came face to face with 125 Kiowa and Comanche warriors.

Led by Satanta of the Kiowa, the Indians formed a horseshoe with the two heels pointed toward the men, and they attacked, encircling them. These were the warriors who had shown fortitude in the painful Sun Dance, where one showed bravery by enduring hours of torture without food or water while tied to the top of the Medicine Lodge by thongs, slipped through loops cut into the upper torso of the Indian. Chapman recognized many of the young braves and knew they weren't facing cowardly men.

Outnumbered twenty-five to one, he watched the sea of Indians, armed with bows and arrows, spears, knives and rifles, moving closer. At the first



Mary, wife of Amos Chapman

volley, Pvt. Smith, who was holding the horses, was cut down. Every man but Dixon was hit.

There were no trees, no rocks, no ravines to shelter the wounded men. Chapman noticed a faint impression in the prairie sod, a few feet away, and he urged the men to stay together and work their way back into that impression, where buffalo had wallowed after rain storms.

The horses were released to prevent the soldiers being trampled beneath the flailing hooves of wounded animals. They carried away blankets, food, and water for wounded men. After working their way back into the wallow, the group began digging in with their hunting knives to form a small barricade against the repeated attacks. They piled the loosened soil around the sides of the buffalo wallow.

As the day progressed, they were running low on ammunition when

Chapman looked yearningly at Smith's ammunition belt. He had fallen too close to the wallow for the Indians to seize it, and the small battalion needed cartridges badly. As the scout's eyes scanned the terrain, he saw Smith move.

"Boys," he said, "Smith is alive and I'm going after him."

Leaving his rifle, the agile scout ran from the barricade and tried to lift the helpless Smith. Though the man weighed only 170 pounds, he was dead weight; and he seemed to weigh a ton. Chapman found it impossible to shoulder him. He ultimately got down and put his back against Smith's chest, placing the soldier's arms around his neck. Chapman got up, but he could barely stagger under Smith.

As the burdened scout hurried toward the tiny garrison, a group of fifteen braves bore down on him. They all recognized the Indian fighter, and they shouted with glee: "Amos, Amos, we have you now."

As he turned to fire at the hostiles with his pistols, he let Smith drop, and friendly fire from his besieged friends was pumped into the Indians. Chapman fired most of his rounds before picking up the soldier and running for cover.

Before he could reach the wallow, another gang came for him. With only one or two shells left, he ran for cover. Amazed, he watched as a young Indian rode straight toward him.

Later Amos said, "I had fed that young scoundrel fifty times, yet he almost ran me down before he fired. I fell with Smith on top of me. I felt no pain, and I thought that I had stepped into a hole."

Dixon looked askance at his scouting buddy, "Amos, you're hurt bad" he whispered.

"No, I'm not," insisted Amos as he helped attend the fallen Smith.

Pvt. George W. Smith had taken a lung shot and was losing both blood and air from the chest cavity. The scouts used a handkerchief to stuff the wound; then they propped Smith up beside Chapman so the warriors would believe they were "alive and well." Amos' ankle bone was piercing his boot. The bone had been severed by the bullet.

Without food or water, the men fought off repeated attacks of whooping, war-painted Indians. A cold front blew in from the North, bringing thunderstorms that drenched the small battalion in the wallow and left them shivering and miserable. Water filled the wallow,

mixing with the blood of the wounded men.

Hating the discomfort, the Indians melted like shadows back into the hills. During the night, Private Peter Rath went for help; but he became helplessly lost and returned, discouraged. No Indians were in sight, and the only sound on the prairie was Smith's sobbing. The private died that night, and his comrades fashioned, with hunting knives, a grave in the buffalo wallow.

At daybreak, Dixon went for help and found a supply train led by Major Price nearby. Price refused to assist the men, though he sent a surgeon to give First Aid. He did send a rider with a message to General Miles at McClellan Creek, seventy-five miles away. Delirious, without aspirin or whisky to relieve their pain, the suffering men endured another day. It was midnight before the sound of horses could be heard across the sage-covered hills and the bugles of the cavalry sounded. Thirty-five Indians had died.

At dawn, the wounded were loaded into wagons for the trip back to Camp Supply, but Chapman preferred to ride his horse, with his shattered leg secured to the stirrup.

In his official report, General Miles said of the battle, "It presents a scene of cool courage, heroism, and self-sacrifice which duty, as well as inclination, prompts us to recognize, but which we cannot fitly honor."

Colonel Dodge, when referring to the fight, said, "Heroic was the conduct of all, but that of Chapman deserves the most special honor; for he received his wound while performing a deed that which in the loftiest of manhood can nothing nobler be."

Back at Camp Supply, Chapman's leg had to be amputated below the knee. While he was recovering, his clothing had to be hidden to keep him in bed. He was fitted with a wooden leg, for which he acquired the nickname "Pegleg." Though the loss of his leg may have impeded his walking, he could ride and shoot uninhibited. He learned to mount his horse without assistance, and until 1892 he continued as Chief of Indian Scouts at Camp Supply.

The scout married the Indian Princess, Onehiou, or Mary Longneck, granddaughter of Black Kettle. They built a home near Seiling, Oklahoma, where they reared ten children. Amos taught Mary to cook, and she taught him the Indian ways.

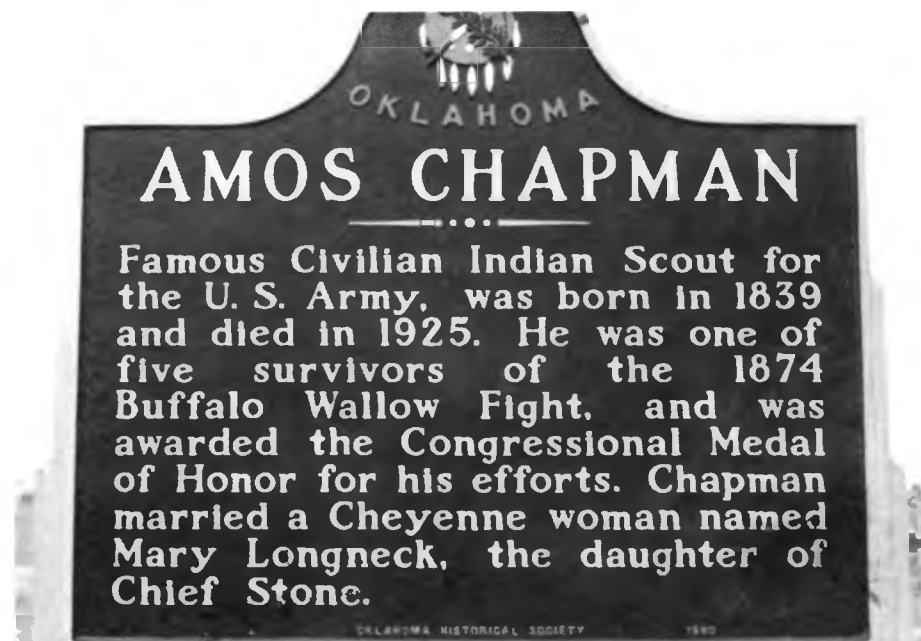
Years later, Buck Chapman said, "Knitski (meaning **Grandmother** in the Cheyenne tongue) kept house like a white woman. I always liked her. She made beaded things for me, including a beaded baseball."

Many of the beaded items on display at the Pioneer and Indian Museum in Woodward, Oklahoma, are believed to be the art of Buck's beloved Knitski. When I interviewed him in 1976, he spoke fondly of his grandparents. He was born in their home while his father completed his own house across the creek, east of Seiling. Buck attended PowWows and Sun Dances with his grandparents. Many times, the Cheyenne camped on Amos Chapman's land, and the family enjoyed the visits. Both Amos and Onehiou were loyal to the Cheyenne Tribe.

"Grandfather always drove a frisky team," Buck's sister, Mrs. Ida Tollar of Seiling, said. "He fell from his buggy, and the fall caused his death on July 18, 1925."

In September of 1976, the bodies of the scout and his wife, Mary, were moved from an obscure resting place on the family farm. They were entombed at a place of honor in Brumfield Cemetery at Seiling. Bearing the emblem of the Oklahoma flag, a historical marker proudly designates the spot.

Author Wayne Montgomery of **FRONTIER TIMES** WROTE, "Chapman was one of the most able scouts on the frontier; and he had a way with Indians, second only to Kit Carson. No more colorful man ever rode the mountains and deserts of the West." ❧



The Oklahoma Historical Society dedicates this monument to Oklahoma's Amos Chapman.

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